

THE

Chiang Rai, Thailand

# TROPICAL TELEGRAPH

Greetings and good wishes from Thailand!

No. 10 Christmas 2011



10th year



*Hello and welcome to the tenth edition of the Tropical Telegraph! It comes with warm good wishes for the season to all my friends round the world.*

*This year, the pictures and stories from the past year appear month by month, in contrast to the usual grouping of topics, people and places. I hope it will give some flavour of the passing of the year and its succession of travels and events. **Read on!***







My first trip to the Emirates: a kindly host team outside the Health Authority HQ



Abu Dhabi: a teaching session on communication skills for local health professionals and ministry officials.

# Ending 2010 and launching 2011

For another year, I've had the good fortune to travel extensively, including Accra, Abu Dhabi, Hyderabad, Istanbul, Dubrovnik, the UK and, of course, Sweden. With last Christmas and New Year in England, I had a total of six trips to see my brother and family, mainly on the back of my working trips to Sweden. Towards the end of 2011, I was away from Thailand for two months, using Sweden as the hub for African and Eastern Mediterranean excursions. I've also been flitting about Thailand, with holidays in Phuket, Bangkok and Chiang Mai and a university teaching week in Pathum Thani.

While I do love the travel (and especially my second home in Utmyrby), I've also had long periods in Chiang Rai - one long enough for me to have to report to Immigration for a foreigner's 90-day stay (this in spite of my having an annual visa).

So, the past twelve months started with my first trip to the Emirates and consultancy work and teaching in Abu Dhabi, prior to my going to England for Christmas and New Year. There I stayed in a posh little bed and breakfast a few miles from my brother's home, and drove back and forth through the ice and snow in the family BMW convertible. Nephew Andrew, wife Laura and son George were all in residence, so we had a very lively and rather wonderful family celebration, though with the threat of Iain's illness poised in the background.

I took the BMW to Sheffield to see my dear friends the Sainsburys, slipped over to Rotherham to have tea with Roy's mum, Vera, then shot up north to the Kennans in their picturebook cottage in Gainford, Northumberland. A day in Oxford with my old friend and undergraduate contemporary, Organ Scholar Chris Swain; reflective wanderings round Worcester College; presentation of my two recent books to the College library; and signing up to receive my long-overdue MA in absentia. Finally, some very jolly time with Roy and Ian in London (including the delight of seeing *The King's Speech*), before returning to the comfort and warmth of Chiang Rai.



Young George (1 year) pretends he's a present.



It was a sumptuous family Christmas.



Perfect food at Christmas and as always at Woodlands.



Back to the UK for Christmas and my brother's birthday: a pile of Jenny's magnificent profiteroles.



Iain enjoying a fat book (I think) about the history of motor racing, one of his passions. Nelson sits by.





While visiting Iain and Jenny, I stayed in this charming accommodation a few miles away.



A trip to Rotherham and a visit to Roy's Mum, Vera Deakin. In her 80s, she's as active and amusing as ever. We remember Roy together (it's nearly 20 years since he died).



I had the privileged use of the family's second BMW while staying at my b&b.



And a day in Oxford to meet my old friend Chris Swain (whose daughter later came out to Thailand and set heads turning in Chiang Rai). A pause by the lake in Worcester College gardens. I also fixed to get my MA at last.



Organ scholar and old friend, Chris Swain, under the arch through which I had passed so many hundreds of times as an undergraduate in Worcester gardens.



With Tony and Maire outside their lovely cottage in Gainford.



After Rotherham it was off to Northumberland and the picturesque home of Tony and Maire Kennan. Here I am by the recently frozen River Tees which runs near their village of Gainford.



Giulia visits the clay-built convalescent room she sponsored in memory of her nephew, who died young in a light aircraft crash. It's at a rural hospital about 25kms from Chiang Rai, where the Director is a friend of mine.



Royal visit: The Queen of Verona (and consort) paid a gracious visit to our humble establishments. She sent Mr Yut all of a dither when she mounted his old motorbike at the farm and demanded a ride. Mr Sorng looks on.



New baby: this is Mr Att with his partner Khun Niw, young Nong Gitaa and a very recent arrival, baby Orm. (More pics of them later in the year.)



Boating at the farm: Ui takes to the water with a small craft which he adapted from a road-running vehicle.

At the annual festival celebrating King Mengrai, founder of the city of Chiang Rai, Nong Gitaa tries his luck with a rifle and dodgy sights.







# February

Hannah Swain, daughter of my Oxford contemporary Chris, visited us on her way round the world. Here, in one of Jacob's splendid photos, she and I stand at the viewpoint on the way up to The Princess Mother's garden and palace on Doi Tung.



Hannah in a fairy circle of hollyhocks at Doi Tung.

Hannah proves an irresistible model for every shot in the gardens.



A scorching plate of somtam in the Doi Tung restaurant.



The royal gardens at Doi Tung are a miracle of colour and design at every season of the year.

Jacob prepares to announce our arrival to the heavens at the ancient Wat Pratat Doi Tung. If you can actually get the massive clapper swinging, the sound is stunning and the bell reverberates for minutes afterwards.



Regular encounter: here's my good friend the artist Khun Paradorn and his talented son while Hannah buys one of their little masterpieces.



A curiosity: this is the beautiful gold, half-hunter watch my parents gave me on my 21st birthday (in 1966). It was unearthed from its secure storage when I visited my brother. It started the moment it was wound up. Sadly, I never wear a three-piece suit these days (at Oxford I frequently did) so it and its double Albert gold chain have lain neglected for many years. It's a Garrard, by the way.



Jacob and Hannah stand in front of the great golden toilet at Wat Rhong Khun - a wonderful new temple complex that is, in all other respects, entirely gleaming white. The famous (and living) architect and builder has a wry sense of humour.



Mr Pom, my part-time farm manager, stands by as agricultural scientists search coconut palms for signs of the dreaded hispine beetle, which put in a brief appearance again this year.



Inside the gents' loo at the great golden toilet.

In a moment of daftness, Ui decided he wanted to have the hairy head and clawed feet of some putative wild animal. It all caused a lot of amusement among his friends.





Rafe and Marie on a day trip to Mariefred, where we had sailed last summer and spent a couple of nights.

Recognition at last? Well, no, not actually: graduate BAs of Oxford (and Cambridge) receive this as a matter of course four years after graduation (if you apply and pay, which I hadn't done until this year).



Any excuse for a celebration! I think this may have been the occasion of my receiving my MA from Oxford, after forty odd years' delay.



The magnificent Swedish landscape and sky in winter.



Rafe shows off the new addition to the Utmyrby fleet - a cute Mazda with its winter hard-top on for the moment.



Last summer at Mariefred - a rather different picture!



This is where we had moored last summer, arriving in the warm afternoon sunshine.

# March



A rare outing for the black tie: Pravich and I outside the Mandarin Oriental Hotel where we were for a concert by the Emmanuel College (Cambridge) choir and a slap-up dinner.



Welcome at Suvarnabhumi airport: some of my Rangsit University students and the Course Director greet me on my arrival from Chiang Rai.

## It was VERY cold in Sweden!

This was the month when the weather started to cause problems in Thailand. There were floods and mudslides in many provinces, though we were hardly affected locally. Chiang Rai distinguished itself by suffering a minor earthquake which damaged some ancient temples in the north, but did no more than briefly rattle the tea cups elsewhere.

After a busy and happy time in Sweden (where the temperature on arrival was fifty degrees less than at departure from Bangkok), I returned home with just a few days before my annual week's teaching at Rangsit University. With the help of my friend Mr Nay (ex-student, now graduated), we covered the enormous syllabus and had some fun too (students still find me a curiosity and an (apparently) engaging challenge). I had about two hundred Facebook friend requests after this session.

As an Oxford alumnus, I had been invited to a concert being given by Emmanuel College, Cambridge, followed by a dinner at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. I invited Pravich to come along, and we had a delightful evening of music, good food and pleasant conversation with young members of the choir. We both enjoyed ourselves rather more than we thought we might!

My young workers at the farm had a run-in with the police, who alleged that they were using amphetamines, though they had none in their possession (a urine-test on suspicion was the evidence) and we had to shell out rather large fines as a result. Otherwise, but for very occasional backsliding, they've been a good team, and the farm is maturing wonderfully.



A day's training for industry: Pravich is an honorary official of the Thai Pharmaceutical Manufacturing Association (PREMA). We had a session on communications and risk management in Bangkok.



Outside my university lodgings: Ajarn Sikkawat, course director, and Mr Nay, the graduate ex-student from my course five years ago, who continues to provide wonderfully helpful translation service for my teaching.



Great food: one evening a group of students and lecturers took me out to dinner at a Japanese restaurant and this was one serving of some of the delicious things on offer.





**April**

**Enthusiasm at the wheel:** young George Hugman seems to be following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps with that look of glee in a car.



**Happy family:** my nephew Andrew with Laura and George.



The tulips were impressive.



The delightful interior of the parish church of Northampton.

## England and a wet Thai festival

**A**t the beginning of the month, my brother was seriously ill in intensive care, and I dashed off to England to be with him and the family. He'd had a major operation and was suffering from post-operative complications and infections. I stayed in a hotel in Northampton, near the hospital. It was a very anxious time, but he eventually pulled through and began to regain strength for a time.

This month marked Chiang Rai's coming of commercial age, with the opening of a full-scale shopping mall and posh department store. I couldn't believe that such sumptuous facilities had come to our quiet little town and wondered just how it could survive. It was a great draw for local people, but few seemed to be spending much hard cash. Among its provisions is a very sophisticated (and expensive) supermarket. They seem to have done a deal with Waitrose with lots of interesting branded products you can't get anywhere else. I have become a regular customer (bread flour included, but there's no decent Seville orange marmalade, which I still have to import in my luggage).

April is the month of Song Kran, the mad water festival when inhibitions are thrown to the wind and everyone in Thailand goes aquatically mad in the streets. I had the pleasure of entertaining a good Swiss friend and her son and hubby for the period. I met Pia through the UMC and WHO, and we had always got on well. Son and hubby took to the back of the pickup for our annual wet tour of the streets (with barrel of iced water), and the well-toned Swiss teenager, shirtless, caused not a few whistles and lascivious stares from the Thai girls (and some of the boys) we passed in their hundreds.

As the month drew to a close, it was off to Sweden again for a training course and another quick side trip to the UK.



Rafe and Marie's lovely old house on a bright spring day.



The bicycles outside Uppsala station are a sight to behold and testament to the Swedish commitment to healthy living and concern for the environment.

**Eccentric limo in Northants:** much as I am committed to public transport, double deckers have never struck me as the most romantic of carriages (though, come to think of it, I did meet Roy on my Showbus when I was PRO for South Yorkshire Transport).



**Springtime in Whittlebury:** my brother and sister-in-law's house looking lovely on a bright spring day. All kinds of cheerful seasonal flowers were popping up all over the place.



The rather incredible arrival of a full-blown shopping mall and department store in little old Chiang Rai. While the carpark is often full, it's not clear how much real cash is being spent.



I do love to see pineapples growing and this year we've had a good few dotted around the farm (delicious too)

**Swiss family preparations:** loading the truck with water and buckets for the Song Kran town run. Pia and family brought delight to the village and this impressive pale teenager turned a lot of heads in the town.



**Service for the fallen:** this day, a young soldier returned to Northampton from foreign fields for his funeral with full military honours.







**UMC training:** thirty participants from all over the world came to Uppsala for this annual course, in which I play a part. This was the lovely view from my bedroom in the course venue hotel.



**Dynamic students:** some of the course participants from all corners of the globe. Lasting friendships are often born on these short courses.



**The Utmyrby fleet:** quite an impressive lineup these days. The workhorse VW at the back is of great age but continues to perform heroically.



*Cosy veranda at the big house.*



*Vivid elegance in the orchard.*



**Sporty expedition:** Marie takes me for a spin in the Mazda.



May

**Rural catwalk:** Marie had an indulgent afternoon modeling some of her latest acquisitions, which were to cause intake of breath at various functions later in the year.



**Moving outdoors:** it was just about warm enough for Rafe to dig out the barbecue and start the year's garden gastronomy.

**The pleasures of laundry:** at home in Chiang Rai I do none of my own washing, but here, with the service of the estate's wonderful Marguerita machine, one's clean sheets can be blowing in the wind in no time at all.



Stowe is one of those astonishing creations of the English aristocracy (in this case, the Dukes of Buckingham). You can just see the great house in the distance through the arch.



**Blazing poppies:** in the home garden, these splendid blooms radiated colour in the sunshine.

**Steak and kidney pud:** I also made one of these glories of English cuisine (with real suet pastry) for the first time in donkey's years. It was pretty damn good and worthy (I hope) of the house's high standards.



It was a delight that Iain was feeling strong enough for me to take him out for a drive. Here we are on the Stowe estate, a frequent destination just a few miles from their home.

**Home baking:** after years of neglect, I resurrected my bread-baking skills and produced a batch or two - in a house where a million loaves had been produced over the years. I kept at it when I got home.







**Yes, another loaf:** well, this is the homemade Thai variety, and I'm proud of it. I still think the transformation from a lump of sticky dough to this delicious finished product is something of a small miracle.



**Rare sight in the Province:** combine harvesters for rice are beyond the individual or collective means of most local farmers, but I have seen one or two recently. Most rice is still planted, cut and threshed by hand as it has been for millennia.



**Unknown:** though very similar to frangipani flowers, these grow on a low shrub in the island garden, and have little scent. But they are spectacularly beautiful.



**Gardenia:** maybe the most heavenly scent on the planet?

## Hometime

**B**ack from travels, June was the beginning of a delicious long period at home, with occasional local trips. From time to time, I found myself wondering what to do with myself, but read a lot and started regular bread-baking (after a successful attempt at my brother's house). I went swimming and spent a good deal of time with Ui, whose fifteenth birthday had prompted me to think again about his future and what I could do to influence it positively. His promised present this year was an iPhone, all his friends having smart phones of one kind or another, and he had taken good care of the modest phone he'd received for his fourteenth birthday. He's still a kid, however (Thai boys being way behind Western teenagers in their development) and I just have to hope he gets motivated in some direction or other before it's too late (though I am fearful). He's started bringing his friends round to the house, and it's occasionally a bit like a cross between a youth club and a caff. Two or three sometimes stay overnight and, I've no doubt, play games and update their Facebook pages after lights-out and strict admonitions to sleep.

The several varieties of gardenia at the farm were especially wonderful this month, and I could hardly stop myself from picking them, sniffing and photographing them every day.



**Occasional exercise:** this is the one place I do take some measure of exercise - a big resort hotel not far from my village. On this day I was the only guest, but it can be horribly busy at weekends and during peak season. It's right by the River Gok.



**Working family:** this is Mr Yut, one of my farm workers, with his visiting sister and mama.



**Alien presence:** my Thai teacher (the lovely Kroo Ploy) had a hedgehog to dispose of and Ui volunteered to take it over. He soon passed it on as his mother wasn't keen on having it about the house. I can't believe it's native, but I must look it up.



**Big family:** here's Ui with his elder brother Mr Nui and his son, outside the new shopping mall. Arms half akimbo seems to be the style of these chaps, all three.



**A selection of fruit from the farm.** We don't even attempt to grow produce commercially, but simply love the availability of exotic things from the land and eat them and share them with friends.



**Mr Yut brings in a fallen jackfruit at the farm.** One of them actually broke the trunk of its young parent tree it was so heavy, and was growing too far out from the centre.



A cute Thai baby at the farm.



Back on the farm, our little island garden is beginning to look quite wonderful - and all of it just mud a couple of years ago.



**Northernmost specimen?** A visiting biologist said he had never seen a Durian growing so far north. After ten years in the ground, this was the first fruit the tree had produced. Dangerous outside and smelly inside - This is love it!





*I still love Phuket and all its pleasures and vulgarities. Here, on Patong beach, where so much was destroyed in 2004, it's again as idyllic as ever when it's not overrun by visitors - but even then it's highly entertaining.*



**Pause for reflection:** the tsunami memorial at Kamala Beach. It's a thought-provoking piece, full of motion and recovery and ultimate harmony.



*Stylish welcome to Phuket: Roy and I were staying in a very friendly, sympathetic guesthouse which always greeted its customers with this display of pretty textiles (as well as warm smiles and helpful service).*



# July

**Into the unknown:** Roy and I are about to kayak into the slight gap under these cliffs in Phang Na Bay, with narrow margins of safety we could hardly have anticipated. Read the full story in my website diary. We did survive!



**Safely half way:** the outward journey under the island brought us into a magical oasis of light and greenery at the heart of the island. We did have a local expert guiding us, but the tide was rising and would we get out again?

**Land for sale:** Here, Mr Oon helps me promote the sale of my piece of land in the north of Phuket. He turned out to be quite handy at writing the Thai version of the sign.



**James Bond Island:** well, we did survive the kayaking and then went on to this famous cinematic location. I must have been there a dozen times, but I never tire of the magic of Phang Na Bay.



*Roy and Mr Oon outside our hotel. Something intriguing seems to be happening on that phone*



**The magic of Phang Na Bay:** it's impossible to capture the magic of this place, but the dozens of misty outcrops and the inlets and lagoons are unique and wonderful. Here we steam away en route for home.

## Serious indulgence and adventure in the south



**Back to Bangkok:** we had a few days in the big city after Phuket, and my dear friend Bui from my home village (now working in the south) came to stay for a day or two.



**Canal competition:** a colourful long-tail boat streaks past us on our leisurely tour of the canals of Bangkok.



**Quayside market:** we'd just disembarked from our long-tail boat trip on the Chao Phraya and offshoot canals, and were assailed by offers of food and T-shirts.

**One meets some of the nicest, best looking people in Bangkok and - apart from Roy, of course - here's another of them:** a very intelligent, amusing young man who was great company.



**Yet another trip:** Wat Rhong Khun is a favourite place for me (and many, many Thais too). Here is Mr Att and family, on the bridge across hell to the viharn on a lowering, cloudy day.

*This architectural abomination appeared distressingly close to my village in recent times. It seems to be some kind of religious establishment. I am just hoping that it and all its works will one day float away well beyond my horizon.*





**A wet year:** the monsoon rains started early this year and have been much heavier than usual. In elevated Chiang Rai, the water doesn't hang around for long, but elsewhere in Thailand it's led to a disaster of epic and enduring proportions.



**Work and art:** my young farm workers, Mr Yut and Mr Sorng, with local artist and friend Khun Paradorn and his wife Khun Meeow.



**Up on the hill:** eleven years ago this was empty land: you can see how the young forest I've planted is growing and how verdant and remarkable it is. Some of the trees (especially the teak) are much bigger than those in the picture.



Khun Paradorn and Khun Meeow with a big gatorn fruit from the farm, about to set off home on their handsome bike.



Mr Sorng brought a big smile to the farm, but, sadly, by the time you read this, he will have moved out with his girlfriend to seek new opportunities.



**Doubtful safety:** Mr Att in his dodgy crash helmet outside my house. Mostly a pleasure, my relationship with him has been complicated by his indigence and his improvident production of a second child.

Cute Mr Yut has a cute baby.



A bumper crop of rambutan this year.

## Visas and pleasures in Chiang Mai

I had to go to the Indian Consulate in Chiang Mai to apply for my visa for the meeting in Hyderabad in September. I then had to return the following week to collect the damn thing. So, for the first trip I decided to have a few days at leisure in Chiang Mai and see what turned up. I stayed in a century-old wooden house which had been converted into a very stylish and unusual guesthouse, built on the banks of the River Ping, catering especially for men of my particular preferences, with sauna and steam room and all the facilities. It was a sister establishment of the lovely place Roy and I had enjoyed in Phuket. I met Mr Wit at a club in town, and we had a delightful few days together - so much so that we agreed to meet the following week when I returned and for him to come back to Chiang Rai with me for a few days. In Chiang Rai we travelled the Province and took a brief boat trip to Laos - the first visit to that country for us both. It was a complete treat and I shall probably see him again later in the year, after a few months of traveling.

It was a month of a bumper rambutan crop, with more, fatter, sweeter fruit than we've ever had before, in spite of our doing almost nothing for them, and abstaining, of course, from all the usual commercial fertiliser and pesticides.



**Chiang Mai style:** like its sister establishment in Phuket, Club One Seven doesn't do things by halves. This is an old room in an old traditional teak Thai house on the banks of the river. With all modern facilities, it still maintains an aura of history and tranquillity (except in the sauna on a Saturday night...)



**Fearless gastronomy:** Mr Wit tucks into an unaccustomed western breakfast with, it appeared, some relish.

**Cheerful companion:** this is Mr Wit on the terrace of the guesthouse. Just one third my age, he was graciously attentive to the needs of an old man.



Waiting for the bus to Chiang Rai, when we went back north together.





The Palace of the Nizams of Hyderabad, reputedly among the richest people in the world at the time and, comparatively, even now in these inflated times. Their glory long past, what remains rests in shabby and neglected establishments like this.



**In full flow:** here I am at the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) conference in Hyderabad, giving what turned out to be an acclaimed session on the future of the pharmacy profession.

Charming and capable Indians: two of the volunteer students in the Press Room (to which I had access) - endlessly clever and helpful in solving problems at the FIP conference. There were more than 2,500 participants at the meeting.



The Charminar in the historic centre of Hyderabad: a 400 year old monument erected to celebrate the eradication of plague in the city.



Indians seem to love having their photos taken with foreign guests. It's gratifying, but mystifying, to be so unreasonably popular.



**Fine specimens of manhood:** incongruous in an Indian setting, but not for the rich and powerful who followed Western taste and pretention shamelessly. (Few of our tour group seemed to share the interest in this glorious object that I felt.)



A very ancient precursor of the Swiss army knife on display in the palace museum.



**Gaudy chariot:** guests at the gala dinner were invited to mount this splendid carriage for photographs and to admire the fine horses and the pretty staff.



# September

An English carriage clock from (I think) the eighteenth century and said still to be in working order.



The lives of ordinary people on the hectic streets.

## Presentation in Hyderabad and nights in a Swedish castle



**Autumnal duties:** Rafe keeps abreast of the huge volume of leaves falling from the two old ash trees in front of the house. He's using a blower to gather the leaves before putting them through the shredder for composting.

**Swedish country living:** UMC had its annual staff planning meeting in this delightful old 'castle' - though it is really more like a grand country house. There were some lovely public rooms, authentically restored and furnished.



**Junior sightseers:** back in Chiang Rai, a junior school class, in Lanna style dress, visit the great new shopping mall with their teachers.

**Glorious crop:** the old apple trees produced a munificent crop this year, including these lovely purple specimens. There are said to be over 2,000 varieties of Swedish apple. Marie makes puddings and cider and juice and stores heaps of fruit over winter.





**South to the sun and east to the Bosphorus**

**Lively students in Accra:** from Zambia, Ivory Coast, Sierre Leone, Kenya, and Ghana these lovely people worked hard on communications skills for three days and left promising that they'd be changing the way the did things once they got home. We'll see!



**Companion for the week:** I met Nana Yaw (aka Raymond) last year. This time he stayed with me for the week, helping with all manner of practical arrangements and problems. We had a lovely, affectionate time together and are regularly in touch.



This is out in deep country about three hours' drive north of Accra. The mountainous landscape is a surprise and a delight.



**Drummer friend:** in Accra I had a brief reunion at an ice-cream parlour with Alphonse, the drummer from the National Dance Group, whom I met a couple of years ago. Now mobile and about to be married, he seems to be doing rather well.



**Young forest:** there seemed to be large areas untouched by the recent assault of man, and this spot, near the big tree, was lovely in the sunshine.

**Cocoa:** I'd never seen cocoa growing before. It seems it's an all-year crop. Many of the pods grow directly from the trunk or the wood of branches. Ghana is a top cocoa exporting country.



**Ancient giant:** this is the base of the biggest tree in West Africa - a 61m Cherry Mahogany, thought to be 400-500 years old. It's the lone survivor of a great forest.



**Healthy living:** an admirable bit of public health promotion at the entrance to the forest and the path to the big tree. Uprooting AIDS has, perhaps, larger purposes than 'healthy tourism', but the message is, nevertheless, well targeted.

**On the way home:** a typical hinterland town with evidence of retail activity of every imaginable kind - and the familiar yellow livery of the MTN mobile network, painted on buildings and houses and huts all over the country.



A training course and new adventures in Ghana; serious work and pleasures in Turkey; short hops to Sweden and the UK.



**UK health policy:** this poster in Balham High Road astonished me with its proclamation of the 'Health lottery': I know it's a money-spinning gimmick, but how could anyone not see the irony and not choose a less provocative name?



**Balham horticulture:** Roy and Ian's garden in Culverden Road was looking very pretty in early autumn. They are very serious about domestic matters and love visiting garden centres. They are also very generous hosts for wandering friends from Thailand.



**Country harvest:** apples and walnuts from my brother's garden in Northants. Iain planted the walnut tree thirty odd years ago and this seems to have been the best harvest ever (we got there before the squirrels, apart from anything else, I think).



**Irresistible gadget:** this wonderful machine is familiar in Sweden (Rafe and Marie have one) and I wanted one too. It peels, cores and slices an apple simultaneously - an exhibit of wondrous mechanical ingenuity. I bought three to distribute happiness.





**Champion pud:** now it's back to Sweden again, and cooking roast moose and Yorkshire pud for Rafe and Marie. I was very pleased with this specimen as it's years since I've made YP. It was slightly dry, I have to admit, but its rising was superlative.



**Serious concentration:** Rafe applies his carving skills to the joint of moose in their lovely Utmyrby kitchen.



Istanbul and the International Society of Pharmacovigilance meeting in the grand Military Museum. My major presentation (on the insidious encroachment of bureaucracy in healthcare) was much acclaimed.



**Impossible cornucopia:** on the other side of the Golden Horn, we found a vast labyrinth of narrow streets, and a multitude of shops and stalls fantastically stuffed and piled high with food, nuts, fruit and goods of all kind. Here, cheese aplenty.



**Current of humanity:** this gap in the crowd was quite untypical of our wanderings, more usually shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of others (and almost no aggression or tension at all).



**Presidential farewell:** my friend Alex Dodoo (left front) President of ISoP and Marie (VP) break the rules on the portico for the group photo at the end of the meeting. The rest are our Turkish hosts and other guests.



**Bridge lunch:** the Galata Bridge across the Golden Horn is lined with shops and restaurants on this lower level. We had some delicious Turkish food and a glass or two of excellent local beer and wine.



**What a monster:** from a distance the scale of the cruise ship becomes clear - it's as high out of the water as a substantial block of flats!



**Free day for sight-seeing:** here we are down by the Golden Horn with a gigantic cruise ship in the background and a little ferry next to it.



**Happy Hugman:** a glass or two of mid-afternoon wine soon puts a smile on one's face...



**Tool heaven:** whole streets and alleys were given over to shops and stalls selling every imaginable type of machine, mechanical device and tool. Rafe was thrilled to bits and chasing obscure items of equipment; Marie and I were simply intrigued.



**End of the line:** at the Taksim Square stop on Istanbul's only tramline, we disembarked and took the funicular up the hill to the Square, and so back to our hotel. (Don't miss Marie's fabulous coat!)



**Plentiful choice:** everything seemed to be available in a host of different styles, shapes and sizes, this bathroom display offering a sparkling range (you must imagine alleys filled with these stalls - row after row of them).

**Afternoon riches:** on the quayside, freshly caught fish were heaped up for sale or instant eating - grilled and presented in a kind of bread wrap being the local speciality.







# November

**Blue horizons:** The WHO meeting took place in the Dubrovnik Palace Hotel, with this marvellous view from the great patio outside the meeting room and from all the bedrooms.

**D**ubrovnik, in bright, warm autumnal weather, was a delight. The hotel, the people, the meeting; the views, the old city, the restaurants, the powerful and moving history of the place - all left a deep impression. We had a lively WHO meeting, with lots of old friends, and getting to know lots of new ones. I am struck on these occasions how energetic and dedicated many people from small and/or developing countries are in their work for patient safety (we had brilliant presentations from Kenya, Zimbabwe and our hosts, Croatia, for example), while the old world seems sluggishly bureaucratic in so much of what it does.

## Romance of the Adriatic



**The long and the short:** my friend Anders from UMC (the tallest man I know) in charming juxtaposition with the delegate from Cambodia.



**Moonlit fort:** part of the defences which repelled the Venetians and the Ottoman Empire for the 500 years of Dubrovnik's independence.



Massive ramparts of the old city.



**Sumptuous seafood:** Rafe and Marie ordered this platter in one of the multitude of interesting restaurants. This one was a former shipyard by the harbour. (Historical veracity forces me to report that they were both a little queasy after this meal.)



The Fortress of Minceta, one of five huge forts set into the ramparts.



Market in Gundulic Square.



**Mainstreet:** the stunning Stradun, rebuilt after an obliterating seventeenth century earthquake and perfectly restored after the cataclysmic assaults of the Yugoslav People's Army in 1991.



The Jesuit church of St Ignatius Loyola. In the background is the Srd mountain with its ancient fort and more recent cablecar - both severely damaged by shelling in 1991.

**The Stradun by day:** no traffic and the paving polished to a mirror finish by millions of tourist feet. Few locals can now afford to live in the over-priced apartments above the shops or anywhere else in the city.



**Lofty view:** through the window of the cablecar, this shows the dense, compact character of the city, entirely encircled by its massive defences. It's astonishing that so tiny a place was so wealthy and powerful for half a millennium.



**Intriguing views:** the mainly narrow streets often lead to open squares and grand buildings. The entire city is built of local limestone, cleaned to its current gleaming state as part of the postwar restoration.





## A turbulent year in Thailand and the world

**A**s I write, parts of Bangkok are still under threat of inundation from the great mass of water which has moved down from the north and the central plains over the past few months. It has left tens of thousands of hectares of agricultural land submerged, and the lives and homes of huge numbers of people wrecked in one way or another. The management of the disaster itself and the communications associated with it seem to have been lamentably incompetent, with no decisive leadership or coherent information. It will take immense amounts of cash, and maybe years for recovery. And there is dire evidence that the City is sinking into its marshy foundations while sea levels are rising. The inexperienced, new (controversial) woman Prime Minister has had a very hard time, and, in the eyes of some, has not come out of the crisis at all well.

## Freedom fighters

**E**lsewhere in the world, it has been an astonishing year, leaving one humbled by the comfort and privilege of one's life, and by the staggering suffering and courage of those seeking freedom and self-determination. While there is no credible comparison between throwing off decades of political tyranny and indignation about the profligacy and skulduggery of Western politicians and banks, it's certainly occurred to me (and lots of others) that we have another kind of tyranny to overthrow if we're to have any hope of just, fair and equal societies. All solutions seem to involve the throwing of money down black holes without the slightest attention to punishing or controlling the blackguards who caused them in the first place, or conserving cash for more humane projects and the future of the planet.

## Destruction

**J**apan's enormous tragedy resonated around the world for some weeks, but has lately fallen out of the news. Footage of the tsunami and the terrible aftermath brought back memories of 2004. When I was in Phuket this year, I visited the tsunami memorial at Kamala Beach for the first time and thought of the almost unimaginable toll of life it had taken - and of my great good fortune in surviving. It's still a topic which grips the imagination of those who hear the story.

## Domestic matters

**T**here have been no major developments on the farm this year, though we have continued modest planting of trees, shrubs and flowers. We now have a reliable electricity supply from our own meter which offers the workers better facilities in their two little houses. We rebuilt the bamboo house by the pool after it had been damaged by a storm and it's now a cosier, safer place for Mr Yut and his wife and child. The hens have been confined in a new pen, built over the pool, and while they continue to lay eggs and procreate, the ducks lay their eggs all over the place and fail to pay any attention to them.

The new garden on the island in the pool has become quite beautiful and is a little horticultural oasis alongside the wilder, forest-like character of the rest of the land. On the hillsides, the trees continue to flourish and you really have the impression of a young forest in the making. In a hundred years it will be magnificent - if it survives the tree-cutting mania of the Thais. My artist friend Khun Paradorn and his family are going to help me create an illustrated water-colour guide to the trees on the land which will form a permanent record of the planting.

## Goodbye to a dear brother



Brothers in the early 50s.



My young brother, Iain, died, age 61, on 19 November. He was a talented, sociable, loving man. He inherited much of our father's brilliance, skill and quiet wisdom and reflectiveness. He leaves Andrew and Laura, his son and daughter-in-law; George, his grandson; Jenny, his wife of nearly forty years. I find it hard to imagine the landscape of my life without him.





## A youngster makes merit

**A**pril is the month when many, many boys take the robes of a novice monk for a few days or longer. It's believed that the commitment brings merit for the individual and his family. Sons or grandsons will also often take the vows when a close relative dies, believing that they'll help the soul on its way. (Ui shaved his head and took his novice vows for a day after Chai's death.) Here, Nong Gitaa, my friend Mr Att's son, is seen, along with a hundred and fifty others, in a huge ceremony at one of Chiang Rai's major temples. The Abbot and the Governor of the Province and other dignitaries initiate the ritual by snipping off a lock of the boys' hair. Then other monks or novices and the parents shave their heads. They are then robed in white and process round the town in trucks and buses, before they are prepared for the final stages: the saffron robes, their simple vows, their farewell to parents and the world, and their residence in the temple.

## Planning ahead Seasonal indulgences

**R**afe and Marie and I have started thinking about the future and particularly about what I shall do and where I shall live in my old age, especially if I become disabled or further demented. The three of us get on wonderfully well and the prospect of our having neighbouring establishments (as we do now, but on a more practical, long-term basis), is one we all find attractive. At present I can't imagine leaving Thailand, nor spending winters in Sweden or England, and tropical warmth does seem a sympathetic ambience for frail old age: but will I miss my family and friends when I can't visit them so often? Wouldn't it be lovely to have a little Swedish community of dear friends? What should I do with my house in London (and all the bloody stuff in store in Daventry)?

And now, my dear brother has gone. He's been a kind of anchor, a fixed point for me in all my wanderings. I'd assumed (as one does) that he'd be around when I was old. He leaves a yawning gap in our little family, not least for two-year old George who'll miss out on having a perfect grandfather as he grows up. How radically the scenery of our lives can change! It's maybe not the time to be planning, but it can't be postponed much longer: I'm fit and healthy now but, 67 in January, I can't rely on that good fortune forever. I don't want to be taken by surprise by whatever may happen (though there's a good chance I will). (Please submit any wise and creative suggestions for getting my life in order to the usual email address.)

**I**mmediately before Christmas, Marie and Rafe and I are having a week on Koh Samet, after some work they're doing at Mahidol University. I haven't decided what I shall do for the festivities, but, currently, have booked my flights back home where I may just pass a quiet time with a few local friends. There are some attractive alternatives, but I should probably stop spending cash like there's no tomorrow.

My annual invitation to friends to visit me in Thailand remains as warm and genuine as ever: I love to have visitors and to spend time sharing the lovely country and province which are my home. Thailand again needs your support after the disaster of the floods - you can do good by visiting as well as offer me the chance of a good time!

**Good wishes and greetings to you all - and do get in touch to tell me what you're up to and when you're flying to south east Asia!**

*Bruce* - Sawasdee khrap!  
 สวัสดีครับ!

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As usual, TT was designed by my talented good friend, Khun Neung.