

The Adventure

How it Began

# THE ADVENTURE



i. How It Began

by Frank Gray

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**Every adventure begins with taking the first step – or in this instance the first flight. A long-haul flight.**

The moment I boarded the Boeing 707 at Heathrow on January 3rd 1969 I felt a twinge of excitement. Bolstered by feelings of genuine altruism Chris and I were bound for Bangkok and from there to Vientiane, capital city of the small, war-torn country of Laos, right next door to Vietnam.

Catching the BOAC flight had been a bit of a scramble. It was my first experience of Heathrow. Mum and Dad and my grandmother had come with me to see me off. Already delayed by an unexpected closure of the M4 from Reading, due to an accident, we then went to the wrong terminal (it did say 'European Airlines') until I found a rather anxious Chris at the check-in.

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The plane stopped three or four times en route. It was about one third full and we had plenty of opportunity to stroll around chatting with fellow travellers and hearing about the adventures they were embarking on.

It felt like a contemporary 'Canterbury Tales' scenario as we swapped our stories. On board entertainment in those days was limited to a single audio channel so we found ways to amuse ourselves to pass the time.

Every airport had its own flavour, but the one that left the most indelible impression was that of Bombay. There a bunch of coolies tried to impress us with their offerings of soft-drink bottles - Sprite, Fanta and Coke - the contents of which were barely discernible, their bottles chipped white with wear. Dawn over the Ganges was unforgettable as the eastern sky showed off a kaleidoscope of colour - all the colours of the rainbow.

In Bangkok we were taken to a hotel to get some rest before taking the evening Royal Air Lao flight to Vientiane. Flight attendants in long silk skirts gave us candies before takeoff. As we lost height over Thailand and neared the Lao capital my heart sank. It felt as though we were approaching one of the furthest-flung, God-forsaken places on earth. Looking down from my window seat the ground below looked red and scorched. This impression was further enhanced by the setting sun gradually disappearing from sight beneath a heavy dark



cloud of pollution brought on by burning off the rice fields I later learned.

Our mission was to work at Lao National Radio, a joint Colombo Plan aid project supported by the British, Australian and German governments. Chris and I were going as volunteers with VSO (Voluntary

Service Overseas). Our brief was to provide basic electronics training to Lao technicians and assist in engineering works as needed.

When we landed and disembarked a small band of volunteers came out to greet us. It felt as though we had reached the last outpost on earth and they had turned out to welcome this tangible contact with home. Most of them were there as teachers. Some of them were to go on to attain high-ranking jobs in the diplomatic service and the UN. Several years later while I was in Phnom Penh, I was to meet up with one of them, the British ambassador to Cambodia. He invited me to dinner at his residence during a visit there.

Out of the airport and on our way to where we were going to live the prospect did not improve either. We passed street sellers with their carts and tilly lanterns peddling basic food - smelly cuttle fish, bamboo rice, mangoes and melons.

That first night did not make things any better. Bombarded by mosquitoes galore (where were the mosquito nets?) I awoke the following morning to find that I was smothered in mosquito bites - knuckles, knees, feet and face in particular. I counted well over a hundred. Many lizards running up and down the walls and across the ceiling were kept busy day and night catching them. No one had told us that we would share our bedrooms with families of miniature geckos. The real geckos clung under the eaves on the outside, breaking the silence of the night with their unmistakable call. Only fifteen months, I thought...

Vientiane was a rather sleepy capital city. At that time it had perhaps a hundred thousand inhabitants but increasing daily as tribal people, displaced from their villages by the war, arrived. The traffic was light with no buses, few taxis and many samlors – tricycles in which the passengers are seated in front of the muscular cyclist. There were three sets of traffic lights, lots of dust along the streets and rather smelly open drains that bred mosquitoes. Many of the streets were lined with flame trees and older houses from the French colonial era added a charm.

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The city sits on the outside of a bend in the massive Mekong river with Thailand on the other bank. In the dry season the river retreats to the Thai bank revealing extensive sandbanks. When it is in flood the raging waters are formidable rising ten metres or more and transporting many kinds of flotsam.

The ever-present backdrop to these years was the Vietnam War which spilled over into Laos. This added much intrigue while prompting many questions about the rightness of the war, the suffering and plight of the many who fled the fighting, and the unfolding human tragedy. Into this mix we inject the role of the fledgling church - and its future.

Our primary role at Lao National Radio (LNR) was to teach electronics to budding Lao technicians and engineers. It was

part of the commitment of the British government to the Royal Lao government. We also got involved in installation work especially at the transmitter site, six kilometres out of town, which housed both medium wave and shortwave transmitters that (theoretically) would cover the whole country. We worked alongside BBC and Marconi engineers and one or two advisers - a rather motley crew. There were also some JOCV Japanese volunteers: I especially remember Mr Hayashi who put on a rather quaint face when trying to find his English words.

Teaching the young Lao was a lot of fun, while giving some insights into their traditional learning style of learning by rote. They also seemed to think they could learn electronics simply by memorising various formulae.

Part of our orientation included a visit to the schools' recording studio, also part of the British aid programme. I well remember going there and being introduced to the studio operator. He was happy to take out a 78rpm record and put it on the turntable for us to hear. "See here" he said "the Good News of Jesus Christ!" The label on the record was 'La Bonne Nouvelle' - a production of Gospel Recordings. They had made recordings from their basic set of scripts in many of the minority languages of Laos - but also in the Lao language. The story of Noah and the Ark was one of the most popular.

We also needed to adapt to the Lao culture and attend the various ceremonies which involved, among other things, tying strings on our wrists. The baci (bassee), as it was known, was conducted whenever people travelled, got married, had a

baby. Thus it was that Chris and I were welcomed upon our arrival. It was conducted, I later learned, by a spirit medium who invoked the spirits. (Was this really Buddhism? I was wondering). On seeing the strings on my wrists the people in church were horrified, and told me to take them off. So, not wanting to cause any offence, I did.

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Both Chris and I were provided with small Suzuki 80cc motorcycles; this gave us plenty of mobility for getting around town and out into the nearby countryside. There we enjoyed exploring some of the trails, admiring the majestic ironwood trees, using our cameras to capture special moments – like when we tried riding water buffalo, or capturing some of those sunsets and those beams of sunlight that emanated from the sun and then came back together at the opposite horizon. The smell of the charcoal-burners is always nostalgic, as are the ox-carts with the huge wheels that take the wood to the burners. There were also the snakes we came across that wriggled across the sandy track in front of us. It was better not to stop, I discovered, having applied my motorcycle brakes only to stop right on top of it – literally.

Our house help was Bounmy in those early days, and part of our obligation to her was to take her back to her home in the evenings, on our motorbikes. Chris and I took this in turns. Bounmy used to sit side-saddle behind us as was the normal practice. My Lao Big Sister, however, told me that this

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was improper and I was duly rebuked, but we kept doing it anyhow. It was at Bounmy's house near the Black Tai village that Chris and I had our first experience of Lao Pi Mai (New Year) celebrations in April 1969. Washing the Buddhas is one of the features of the festival. Related to this is the custom of soaking people with water – along the streets (not so good for motorcyclists!) but also in people's homes. We were happy to join in the fun! Happily the weather is very warm in April so having a bowl of cold water poured down your neck can be quite refreshing – once you get used to it! It all amounted to good fun and a lot of hilarity.

Bounmy later married Gresham, a volunteer at LNR who had preceded us and with whom I had lost touch for many years, but in God's timing met up again in England during the 1990s. By this time both Gresham and Bounmy were believers, too. They moved back to Laos around the turn of the century, but sadly a few years later Gresham died of a heart attack. Bounmy now lives back in Vientiane with her extended Lao family and it was a joy to go to the Naxay church with her and have lunch when we returned in 2016. We are also glad to meet up with her whenever she comes to England. She has been a lifelong friend.

Much of the radio equipment we worked on at LNR was made by Marconi from UK. Occasionally it broke down - like that July day in 1969 when we were getting ready to relay the first



moon landing. The main transformer of the medium wave transmitter had shorted out. Happily, with all hands on deck, we were able to find a replacement and get the transmitter back on the air in time...

Working out in the antenna field all morning under the blazing sun made us especially thirsty and we welcomed the lunch break. We had found a bachelors' paradise in Chez Rossi, the French restaurant on Avenue Lane Xang next to the cinema. For a mere \$1 a meal Chris and I contracted for one 5-course meal every day. We would dive in there for lunch and sometimes consume four or five wine bottles of drinking water each to slake our thirst. The only time we ever asked to switch an item on the menu was when the main course was the dreaded 'cervelle' (brain).

The war was close by and we were constantly reminded of this by occasional explosions. Just down the road from where we lived in Saylom one night someone lobbed a grenade over the wall of the North Vietnamese embassy.

At the national radio station we were never far away from hard news and much political to-ing and fro-ing. We could always identify cars of the diplomatic corps by their number plates – and which country they represented, alphabetically according to their name in French. The USA was 36 (Etats-Uni) and the French 39 (France). Grand-Bretagne was 42, etc. Vientiane was loaded with intrigue – not unlike Port-au-Prince in Haiti under Papa Doc, one diplomat commented. There were said to be more embassies per square kilometre than there were bars.

In the radio station we had privileged access to a teleprinter. In fact it was kept in our foreign aid office. We often had it tuned in to transmissions from Khaosan Pathet Lao (KPL) to read the propaganda it spewed out about communist advances. I still have copy of the announcement of the death of Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi just across the border.

Flying planes also became a feature of our work and provided some of the most memorable experiences in those early days. After being there for just a few months our boss arranged for me to accompany a New Zealand Air Force training flight. He was rumoured to have bribed the skipper with a crate of whisky to fly to Luang Prabang to take a two-ton generator set for the radio station there - located right opposite the royal palace. The plane was the front-loading Bristol Freighter. My assignment was to supervise the offloading of the generator set from the plane and position it in the engine house at the radio station.

It was just as well they gave me ear-muffs as the noise inside the fuselage was horrendous. But the real challenge was upon arrival



in Luang Prabang: there was no lifting equipment! We just had steel pipes and crowbars and had to drop the generator onto the truck, and then off the truck and into the station. The Lao

coolies and Singaporean technicians were looking to me for direction!! A few hours later it was installed. When fired up, with its AEC diesel engine, it sounded just like a London bus!

It should be noted that flying in Laos was not for the faint-hearted. It was reckoned that about one plane went down every month or two - some for the most hideous of reasons, and usually with loss of life. It was reputed to be the graveyard of DC-3 (C47) Dakotas. Sadly the British military attache was one who was killed when his plane crashed in the Mekong river a few months before we arrived.

Much safer, of course, was to travel in the Army plane assigned to the British embassy. Once



I was asked to accompany a representative from Cable & Wireless on a day trip to Pakse in the south where the third radio station of the LNR trio was located. It meant about three hours flying each way in the de Havilland Beaver. Flying between the

giant cumulonimbus clouds that towered above was memorable as we saw them at close range and our pilot navigated carefully between them.

I learned to balance out two separate social lives. The first was connected to the British group and the social life at the

Embassy to which we were attached. I found it a bit heady to be classified as junior Embassy personnel and to follow the associated political protocols.

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One particular privilege we enjoyed was free access to the Embassy swimming pool, but we also were invited to a variety of special events, such as celebration of the Queen's Birthday. On such occasions we would hobnob with the diplomatic circle and catch up with the latest items of intrigue.

In fact shortly after we arrived in the dry season of 1969 the war seemed to escalate. There were massive advances across the Plain of Jars by the Vietnam-backed Pathet Lao forces, resulting in large gains in territory and the fleeing of thousands of tribal people. It seemed as though it might not be long before we would be evacuated.

Lao National Radio also had its own social life - especially parties. At the Christmas party they asked me to sing so I chose "How Great Thou Art" in Lao, and the band provided the accompaniment. They remembered it and would sometimes, in fun, say "Phra Chao nying nyai, men bo?" (So God is great, is he?) Being attached to Lao National Radio also meant that we came under the Ministry of Information and had privileged access to events of national importance. Radio often needed to be in the front line. Sometimes our involvement was of a practical nature, like setting up equipment, but other times it

was merely a social event which we as foreign aid workers needed to attend. This gave us some unusual encounters.



One of the most memorable and humorous of these was when Chris and I accompanied Brian, one of our BBC superiors, to Luang Prabang, the then royal capital, for the annual Pi Mai (New Year) celebrations (in April). There were several special events planned for that week, one of which was a special beauty pageant hosted by the Cercle de Luang

Prabang. Chris and I wore our lounge suits as specified, but Brian had mistakenly packed his white dinner jacket. When we entered this prestigious club we were shown to our seats at a table just in front of the main stage. Immediately deep anxiety overtook Brian. He surmised that he had been mistaken for the British ambassador. We looked on as the Crown Prince arrived and seated himself at the table next to ours - and Brian's anxiety grew.

We consoled Brian "Look, we can't do anything about it now, but just pretend you are the ambassador!" This pretence was to be put to the test when the pageant started and each of us sitting in the front were invited onto the stage by one of the beauties. We had to perform with them as partners some of

the exotic Lao dances, including the famous Lamvong, twirling our hands gracefully as we paraded around in a circle. With that over we returned to our seats and awaited the judges' verdict. To my surprise it was my dance partner, Miss Lao Airlines, who was voted the queen!

Later that week we sat in the grounds of the royal palace and watched the parade of the candle-lit Naga float down the zig-zag pathway of mount Phu Xy opposite and into the palace grounds. It was magical! I had to pinch myself to confirm it was real...

There was also a fairly active Lao-English Club – but unfortunately for me many of their activities were on Sundays and in conflict with church. I went on a few outings, however, which mostly comprised river trips in the embassy boat, going upstream to waterfalls, many of which were on the Thai bank.

The annual boat races on the Mekong were a highlight of the year. These are depicted on the back of the 1000 kip banknote of that time and are watched by members of the royal household. The year I



was in the crew (where we all sat one behind the other and paddled our long dugout) we sank after filling up with water. It was caused in part by an extended dual with the Lao-Australian club crew where we splashed sheets of water at

each other in the warm-up. We all suspected that our borrowed boat had a serious leak – which was what we told the Aussies! Sinking was not so bad when we discovered the river was shallow enough to walk with our feet on the river-bed – so we walked our sunken boat to the finish line – and received widespread applause.

Perhaps the most spectacular of all the Lao festivals was the Rocket Festival held every year in May. Its purpose, so we were told, was to appease the rain gods by firing huge rockets up into the clouds that were beginning to fill the skies at this time of year in advance of the coming wet season. The rockets, many of them made by the monks across the river in Thailand, were placed four at a time on a makeshift bamboo launch pad on the sandy floor of the Mekong River. They were massive, up



to 10 metres in length and quite heavy. It seemed as though the preparation for launch was almost as critical as building them. The rate of burn had to be controlled by wetting the gunpowder, a crude mixture that included goat manure, charcoal and

various other ingredients. Communities and agencies would sponsor the production of their own rocket in the belief that the success – or failure- of their rocket would be a portent of their success during the coming year.

Crowds lined the banks of the Mekong in Vientiane as the rockets were prepared and then placed four at a time on the

launchpad – and their fuses lit. The suspense was killing. There might be a puff of smoke then all grew quiet before the rocket would take off in a direction that took them across the bend in the river – a clear passage of 2-3 kilometres. Some rockets did not ever take off. Others exploded in a spectacular fashion on the ramp. The successful ones left with a gigantic whoosh of smoke and fumes and climbed up into the clouds. Some went off course. One, I remember, headed straight across the river into Thailand, while another of more ambitious design with small wings, took off then turned on its back and soared over our heads into the city. Where it landed we never knew.

Socialising with the British ex-pats was not always easy. Farewell parties at the embassy just before teaching English to my Lao friends at church sometimes got me into trouble when they caught a whiff of my breath, so in the end I concluded that alcoholic drinks were more trouble than they were worth, and just drank Pepsi. Perhaps the most difficult part of socialising with the British crew was when we were doing work out of town. I remember being in Pakse and the team went out for dinner – then afterwards stopped by one of the bars in town. I had no choice but to go with them, knowing that it could get difficult. It did – especially when it came to leaving and I had had a bar-girl sitting with me topping up my glass. But I stood my ground even though I found myself in an awkward moment with the volunteer with whom I was staying.

My other social circle was in connection with the Lao church and missionaries, and it was this that gave me the greatest fulfilment. Going to Lao services armed with my own Lao Bible





and hymn book was a great help in picking up the language and learning to read it. I would recommend this for two reasons: reading the Bible in Lao was a special bonus if you already knew what the passage was about, and singing the hymns was a very good way of hiding your mistakes while reading at a slower pace. The downside was that it encouraged a rich biblical vocabulary at the expense of one for daily living. I was soon teaching an English class among the young people (and, thanks in part to Facebook, I am still in touch with many of that small group of 10-12 over 45 years later!).

Each English class was followed up by a visit to the house of two of them – sisters Keodouangsy (Big Sister) and her younger sister Keovandy - where I learned Lao with the help of a Lao language primer. It was great fun! I would go to the



market to practice my Lao speaking and comprehension - and the Lao people were so encouraging in their appreciation of my efforts! Lao being a tonal language it was a challenge getting the right

tone. Take the Lao word 'ma' for example - it could mean a horse, or a dog - or the command to come - just depending on the tone - low, high, rising or falling, etc. I can't say that I ever mastered the tones.

One special place to relax and get some physical exercise was the tenpin bowling alley. One exceptional evening stands out in my mind. After attending the anniversary celebration at the Vietnamese church, missionary Norman and I felt we needed to let off a bit of steam. It was our second game when something unusual happened. Every ball I bowled produced a strike (all ten pins down in one go). It seemed so easy and I soon began to tremble. Seven strikes in a row and in the eighth frame I was only able to produce an 8 and a spare. But the rest were all strikes - for a grand total of 276! I can only assume that listening to two hours of Vietnamese (which I did not understand) had completely flushed out my mind and imparted peace. I would recommend it...!

My first Christmas there left some unforgettable memories. It was like none other that I had ever experienced. Not least was the carol-singing adventure that we embarked on early in the

evening of Christmas Eve. I had borrowed the team Land Rover from the radio station and, loaded with young people, we set off from the church for our first visit to a church member's home. We did not get further than the Monument when I was aware that we had a problem with wobbly steering.... Inspection revealed that one of the front wheels was about to fall off. The lock nuts were all loose and needed to be tightened. (We learned later that it had just been in the garage having brake pads replaced - but they had not tightened the nuts!).

With the wheel-nuts tightened we continued on our way - first to one house then another. We criss-crossed the city without any consideration for where we had just come from, or where we were going next. Most often after we sang carols we were invited inside for refreshments - then continued to the next venue. By 10pm I felt sure that we would soon be packing it in because there was a big Christmas programme at the church at 9am the next morning (Christmas Day)! Midnight came and went and I was beginning to get edgy, Finally about 2am we arrived at what proved to be our last port of call. Would they still be waiting up for us? It was to be the house It was to be the house of Panya Touby Lyfoung. He was the 'king' of the Meo (Hmong) people and the chief representative for the Hmong in the Lao government. He was also known to be a Christian and some of his children were in the youth group. Yes, they were expecting us and gave us a good meal before we left for home - and bed!

At the annual That Luang Fair in October it was a very special privilege for us as VSO volunteers to be introduced to the king



of Laos. We lined the parade route one evening and one by one shook hands with King Sisavang Vong, being especially careful to keep our heads lower than that of his majesty – for cultural reasons and to show respect.

There were a few other Christian volunteers in Laos and it was great to have them around. Tony Redstall was possibly the one with whom I did the most. He was teaching at the Technical School. Roy Tatton from Edinburgh was also a committed Christian while Gavin, another Scot from Glasgow had devoted much of his time supporting the SNP. They both worked at LNR and came the following year. Gavin was later to come to faith and became first a missionary in Thailand then later a pastor back in his native Scotland.

Tony and I had an adventure or two. Perhaps the most memorable happened one Sunday after church. We were both seated in the back of Ellen's Beetle going down the road from the church. Suddenly as we neared the junction at the end of the road there was a commotion as a motorbike sped by with a missionary giving chase and trying to push him off! 'He's got my wife's purse! Stop him!' Norman shouted. But any attempt to stop him was in vain as he turned right and disappeared in a cloud of dust. 'Let's try to catch him!' we said. Ellen was game and we shot off in hot pursuit. It led us out into the country – and we could see the dust being kicked up by the speeding motorcycle. We were almost ready to give up the chase when, rounding a corner, we saw the fellow stopped by the roadside, emptying the handbag. Ellen swung the car to cut off his escape and Tony and I leapt out as fast as we could (from the back seat of a 2-door VW!).

We took chase through the trees gradually closing the distance. The thief reached a barbed wire fence and leaped over and I was able to catch his arm in a half-nelson. He lunged forward and bit into my left forearm, drawing blood. Tony arrived. Ellen said the police had been notified and would be coming. Sure enough they were on the scene surprisingly quickly. We then had to go to a police post to make a statement and the police escorted the thief away. This was not his first robbery we heard. He would be put behind bars. The week that followed was not easy. I was afraid there might be reprisals. I also began to feel sorry when I thought of him languishing in a Lao prison.

But such sympathy was short-lived. The following Thursday morning Tony and I were at the airport catching a plane to Savannakhet. Suddenly Tony grabbed my arm... 'Look!' He

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said. 'It's that guy again!' 'What guy?' I asked. 'The one we caught on Sunday!' I was incredulous. 'No, he is behind bars.' Tony insisted. 'Just wait till he turns around,' he hissed. We looked, and sure enough it was the very same fellow, now neatly dressed with a clean white shirt. Tony and I were the last to board the Viscount of Lao Airlines. There were few seats left. In fact there was just one seat for me – across the aisle from the fellow who had bit me. Our eyes met. My

arm was still bandaged. So much for justice. He stayed on the plane which was going to Saigon while Tony and I got off at Savannakhet. If the fellow had disembarked too I am not sure what we would have done.

By the end of the first year (1969) I came to the realisation that I would soon need to be going home! My original contract was for 15 months only. But I couldn't go home - I was having too much fun! Although my initial reactions upon arrival had been negative I found that God had changed all that and the country and its people had grown on me. So I was able to extend my term by another 8 months so that I could be home in time for Christmas 1970.

It proved to be a choice that would change the course of my life. The missionaries had been planning to build a recording

studio at the Laos Bible Training Center (LBTC). They sought my help because of my radio connections. A lot of help had already been gathered from FEBC missionaries in Seychelles via ham radio links... Once the studio was built and soundproofed it was time to install the equipment - and this was how I first got my hands-on involvement....

One night was especially memorable.... Don and I were busy soldering wires and connecting everything together.... and I was lying flat on my back on the floor. Suddenly, I had a sort of 'Damascus Road' experience. "Frank! Why did you come to Laos? And why radio?" (It was God on the line...). Pause.... "There is no one to run this studio so I want you to do it!" Suddenly it all became crystal clear. I told Don, and he was delighted, too, to know that someone would be coming to run the studio. This would release him from that activity, one that he believed in, but not one he could devote his time to.

It also answered the big question which accompanied my openness to God about my calling. When I told my Mum and Dad they were, understandably, not too happy at the thought of my going back to Laos again - but they also wanted me to be doing what God had planned, and did not want to stand in the way.

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Thus it was that, when I left to go back to UK at the end of my extended term, in early December 1970, the pain of parting was off-set by the almost certain knowledge that I would soon

be back. God's plans for my life appeared to be unfolding. I chose a Sunday afternoon to leave and all the young people from the Naxay church came to Wattay airport to say goodbye. Wonderful as it was (about 150 came to bid farewell to 'Tan Freng') it brought its problems as they gave me gifts which were impossible to take on the plane.

Once back in UK it was back to living with Mum and Dad again. After two years of total freedom in Asia (where nobody there knew anyone known to us in UK). I discovered I had changed. Why did everyone worry over trivia? If the milkman had not yet come - so what? I had not had any milk for two years! And why so much fuss over pet food? That was obscene after what I had observed and experienced in Laos. My parents even observed that I did not seem to care about anything anymore - and that 'something has happened to Frank.' The laid back 'bo penh yang' (never mind!) outlook of Lao culture had rubbed off.

I even had to sign up for unemployment benefit and stand in line to 'sign on' every week. I felt like a nobody in my own country. In Laos I had felt like a somebody - someone who stood out from the crowd. But not at home. Very soon I got a job at an engineering works through Manpower employment agency. One of our products was massive ball-valves for oil pipelines in the Middle East. One young engineer who worked there, Alan, had several conversations with me - then finally told me I had wasted two years of my life in Laos. I felt indignant and strongly affirmed that, on the contrary, these had been the best two years of my life. True, I was not married



yet and did not have a solid job, but it reminded me of how small-minded people at home can be...

I lost no time figuring out how I might get back. This put me in touch with the headquarters of the C&MA mission in New York. They stipulated that if I were to become one of their missionaries I would first need to complete four years at one of their Bible schools. I countered by pointing out that if we were to wait four years there would possibly not be an open country (Laos) to return to. The studio work was needed now.

The Laos Mission of the C&MA were copied on this correspondence and they were anxious for me to come back quickly - even as an associate. The field chairman at that time was also serving as pastor of the International Church in Vientiane (which I used to attend). One Sunday morning he put the proposal to the congregation that they undertake my monthly support. They agreed.... I shortly received a telegram: 'Come!'

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NOTE:

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