

We Were Frank With Each Other

BY KAY COCHRAN, '57



The author, Kay Cochran, poses with a water buffalo in South East Asia.

The author and eleven other O. U. students spent the summer in an "Experiment in Understanding." The group visited Southeast Asia, stayed with native hosts, and saw the area as no tourist could.

FLYING FISH, rice paddies and hand washing hung on bamboo poles made an unusually exciting summer school session for twelve O.U. students.

The students and Dr. Percy Buchanan, director of the Institute of Asiatic Affairs, sailed from San Francisco June 17 on an "Experiment in Understanding." The educational theory behind the trip: by living with and sharing the experiences of Asians, we could better understand them. As it turned out, we found the Asians were interested in understanding us, also.

Scholastically, six hours of History 190 is recorded on our transcripts. But the government, psychology, economics, sociology, art and even home economics we learned this summer cannot be recorded, nor can the friendship and understanding we found.

We lived in homes of every income level. We traveled third class. We saved money and we began some of the most lasting and wonderful friendships we will ever know.

Nearly a month of our summer was spent steaming across the ocean. We began to discover what understanding really means:

Sharing third class dormitory-type rooms with some 500 Japanese, Filipinos, Indians, Malaysians and Chinese . . . eating with chopsticks and finding them easier to manipulate than knife and fork . . . enjoying the Japanese salad of barely cooked whole peas (shell and all), celery, onions and bits of boiled beef, all sprinkled with

soy sauce . . . trying the new taste of pickled seaweed and finding it much like horse-radish—a little goes a long way . . . learning the music and dances of other countries, laughing together at Japanese and American movies . . . attending the lectures by an eminent New York anthropologist and our own Dr. Buchanan and beginning to understand the common ancestry of man and to know that his differences are chiefly cultural.

The reception and hospitality given us was the most wonderful thing about the whole trip. Thousands of miles from America perfect strangers took us into their homes and fed us. They treated us as family members while showing us their country at work and at play.

We were frank with one another. They showed us both the advantages and faults of their countries. We saw the rich homes and the slums. We saw river boat squalor and jungle reclamation and resettlement projects. We went to churches and police stations.

We learned there is morality and immorality in every country where humanity rules. There is graft and corruption. And there is truth and light. There are honest governments justly run and there are political machines.

We learned that food and laughter and love are the common bonds of men, no matter what their nationality.

We shared two crowded third class train

cars with 90 Malayan students during the two-day trip from Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur in Malaya. We discussed the things college students everywhere discuss—politics and philosophy, dating, college and professors. From these students came our first inkling of the intense political situation in Malaya.

The British are scheduled to grant Malaya full independence next year. The students and many others we talked to are against the independence. They feel it will result in civil and perhaps international war. Many Malaysians feel their countrymen have not yet reached the degree of political maturity needed for democratic government. They fear the people will be attempting a type of government they don't understand and will become a manipulated mass in the hands of some too-strong leader.

There is strong disagreement in internal policy between the mild native Malaysians and the more radical Chinese Malaysians. Attempts of the Chinese Malaysians to gain control of the government when the British leave will almost certainly result in civil war.

Should this war break out, Communist guerillas now hidden in inactive jungle bands would probably join forces with possible help from China. Any outside interference such as that in the Korean conflict might easily result in international war.

The Philippine Islands presented a very sharp contrast between the very rich and

the very poor. We were feted and publicized by the social leaders of Manila. We visited tiny nipa huts, home of the very poor.

Nipa huts are smaller than the average American living room. The floors are hard packed dirt. If the hut is elevated, woven mats are laid over the bamboo floor. Walls of the hut are woven from the nipa palm and fastened to a frame of large bamboo poles. The roof is of a special straw. Stoves in the tiny kitchen are often simply fires built in the end of a sawed-off oil drum. Animals are tethered beneath or behind the house.

Every family usually has at least one caribou to furnish transportation, horse power and milk. Cows are almost nonexistent. The millions of nipa dwellers usually farm about a hectre (two and a half acres) of land. They make only enough money to buy basic clothing and cigarettes. Old Filipino women chew betel nut and smoke a long thin black sort of cigarette with the lighted end inside their mouth.

Barrio dwellers seem to want no more than the shelter and basic needs satisfied by their nipa hut and two and a half acres of land.

I had not realized that Manila was almost totally razed by our freedom planes when MacArthur made good his promise to return. The scars of war still show in Philippine cities. War is still fresh in the mind of the Filipino. There is surprisingly little hatred in his heart for the Japanese. But he remembers.

There are stories of starvation and sur-

vival by sucking on a sugar-filled match stick. Young men and women of my generation tell of watching torture and rape and murder.

Ten years is not as long for a war-scarred country as it is in a nation unscathed by war.

Filipinos are friendly and eager to display their hospitality. But they are a people struggling to find themselves and their national personality. Filipinos have looked at 180-year-old America and tried to copy her manners and methods. Yet the Filipinos have only this summer completed their tenth year of independence.

Sometimes the Filipinos don't copy the good things of America. A few American soldiers, a few American businessmen (exploiting the Filipino) and American movies have given the Filipino an impression of American immorality. It is the wrongdoers who are noticed, not the many fine American military men and honest businessmen working in the Philippines.

The Catholic Filipino idolizes the movie stars and disapproves of the high divorce and re-marriage rate. This he understands as a part of our culture just as we understand the Hindu custom of two wives.

We had a short audience with President Magsaysay. A resettlement and reclamation project similar to our homestead act was explained to us in detail. We began to see the Philippines as an adolescent nation looking to her big sister United States as the perfect ideal.

Favorite phrase of the Filipino people is "never mind." And they never do. Fili-

pinos seem ageless. They seem never to grow old. They do things as they can get them done and don't worry about how long it takes or when they will finish. If something they would rather do interrupts them . . . "Never mind."

In southeast Asia we found misunderstanding and misconception of America and Americans. Asians try to picture America from her movies. It is impossible to call any single imaginary movie incident typical of America. But these people have no other way of picturing American life. They regard America as one of the greatest nations on earth and are curious about her customs and modes.

The idea that anyone could believe cowboys and Indians still fight on the Oklahoma plains or that lynchings are still common occurrences would have seemed preposterous six months ago. But we visited countries where outlaws and communist guerillas are active, where lynchings and murders and gang law are common. When these activities are depicted on American movie screens, there is no reason for disbelief among the Asian viewers.

Asians are inclined to believe also the propaganda distributed by the communists decrying American capitalism. The full realization of the reasons for this came on our returning visit to Honolulu. This city, which had looked tropical and oriental on the way to Asia, now seemed very much Americanized. It was a sharp contrast from the scenes we had seen in other cities on our tour.

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Kay Cochran and two other O. U. students—Katie Elliott and Alberta Pennington—attended a carnival at agricultural branch of University of the Philippines. A professor of agronomy stands between the girls, and Filipino students complete the group.



The O. U. students stayed in native homes when possible. The Douglas Ho family of Singapore were hosts to the author for four days of her stay in that city.

"When people are educated, they just naturally know how to live better. Our culture is strengthened and advanced. Racial relations come easier. A good education helps the family, it helps Oklahoma, it helps the nation."

A stocky social science teacher with a crew-cut became almost angry. He's teaching, he said in no uncertain terms, to make more responsible, thinking citizens of our youth. He deplors the fact that "too often a minority can end up controlling our country." As a whole, he said, the American people are very poor citizens. They fail to understand their government, so they fail to vote. Then, with less passion, he said, "It gives me a fine feeling to see one of my students come forward at the end of a term and say, 'You know, I've learned something this year.'"

Some hold the theory that a person is either born a teacher, or else he cannot be one. A woman from Choctaw school district talked of it. "I've never ceased to think of teaching as a calling," she said. She meant it. As she talked, she looked at the sky, narrowed her eyes and put eloquence behind her words with little meaningful nods of her head. "You get joy out of it. It's one of the most creative fields, and you can't forget that you're dealing with the most precious of all things: humanity. You're trying to meet the needs of the individual, and if you can shape one or two children for a good future, then look what you've gained! No, financial gain never seems to really count too much, but that inner satisfaction surely does. I love teaching!"

Seated in a room crowded with people and riotous with noise, a young blonde stared at her shoes and kept one forefinger over her lips. She had just finished complaining of how tired she's grown of teaching—after only five years. Now she seemed afraid to say more. Nevertheless, a moment later she raised her eyes, unsealed her lips and admitted that, yes, she knows exactly why she will stay on in her small, rural elementary school: she feels a constant need to be needed.

At the close of each school year, she went on, a near-panic overtakes her. She looks at this student and that, each an individual, one who stutters, perhaps, another who learns relatively slowly. She prays their next teacher will give them the little special attentions and the big understanding they'll need. Then she realizes that she herself will, in all probability, be teaching new students who stutter, learn slowly, need her understanding.

Tired or not, she'll be back on the job next year.

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A new Chevrolet spun by and I was struck by the size of this brightly colored chrome monster. I was used to seeing the tiny, dull-colored German and English cars. Huge plate glass windows everywhere gave the impression of rich luxury after three months in countries where there are no plate glass windows, no long counters full of hundreds of the same item.

We had seen open stalls, and market places where whole areas are devoted to individual stalls filled with the same item. The buyer can be sure of getting the best quality available for his money if he is a wise bargainer. (We often left these bargaining sessions feeling we had been slightly "taken." I still have an impulse to try to bargain down too high prices.)

Racial segregation probably does the American people more harm than any other issue abroad. The front page of a large Chinese newspaper in Singapore showed a picture of a nine-year-old boy being initiated into a United States Ku Klux Klan chapter. The picture and its caption implied membership of all ages in such organizations is common in the South. Publicity such as this does nothing toward building international relations in a land where all people have dark skins.

These people who condemn American race prejudice forget their own strong feelings against the Chinese. Chinese are resented throughout Southeast Asia because of the feeling that they have taken over business and government which does not rightly belong to them.

The shadow of communism and Communists was everywhere we turned. But it has not invaded Thailand. This little nation has managed to stay neutral and detached from every great corrupting influence except that in her own government. But the countries surrounding Thailand are Communist dominated. The same political ring has controlled Thai government for 13 years.

In Japan we are told communism is the idealistic variety appealing only to the intelligentsia. Communist activity is concentrated in intellectual centers.

Bali was a primitive and peaceful paradise. Rice paddies there were marvelous engineering feats created with primitive wooden tools. More than 2,000 years were

required to construct these beautiful terraces of rice. There is no electricity or running water. Families bathe together in clear mountain streams. Beauty and religion are closely combined.

In Balinese simplicity there is no need and no place for communism. Not so in the rest of Indonesia. A hotel clerk in Djakarta, Indonesian capital, told me two Russians had stayed in the hotel the night before. He said communism is accepted and taken for granted in Indonesia.

In Singapore a reliable source said the Red Chinese bank does more business than any of the other large Singapore banks.

Communists are ready to move into Malaya when the British leave.

These are countries where communism is a real menace. The Communists are actual and active. They stage bandit raids. They sabotage rubber plantations and attack tin mining operations. We were shown trees the Communists had slashed so they could never again be tapped for rubber. We visited a tin mine surrounded by bald hills where the communist guerillas are heard at "target practice" every night.

The Communists, we are told, have a strong selling point in Red China. Though they have not lived up to their promises there, they have improved living conditions. The Americans have not been able to give any such aid. In some areas of Southeast Asia, Chinese communism is held above American democracy.

But everywhere we went we found the people were friendly toward us and toward America.

We had no friends to wave goodby in San Francisco. Our families had been left in Oklahoma. But at every other port there was someone to greet us cheerfully and to wave a sad goodby.

Four of us nearly stayed in Yokohama. Our bribed taxi driver brought us to the pier just as the last gang plank was being removed. We climbed onto the runway and found ourselves swinging in mid air. Two thousand people waiting to wave "sayonara" to friends and relatives aboard the President Cleveland cheered and applauded as the lowering gangplank was swung back into place and the four of us clambered aboard the Cleveland. Two thousand friends were glad we "made it."